

Elk Feedground Management Planning Public Process, Phase II
Stakeholder Group Conversation Summaries: February & March, 2022

The Elk Feedground Management Planning Stakeholder Groups (General Public, Government & Elected Officials, Landowners, Outfitters, Sportspersons, and Non-Government Organizations-NGOs) initiated their group conversations at the February 1, 2022, stakeholder meeting in Pinedale, WY.

Below is a summary of the themes discussed in each stakeholder group during their initial meeting, and following meetings during February and March, 2022. Since each group took a different approach to their meeting format, content, and frequency, the questions and responses are not uniform across all groups. The notes below are a summary of the themes and ideas presented through the group discussions; they are not verbatim, nor are they in any prioritized order.

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General Public	
February 1, 2022	
Biggest concerns or constraints around future feedground management:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWD and its long-range effects • Hunting and tourism sustainability • Inaction (e.g., that WGFD will not 'rise to the occasion and respond to this current situation) • Brucellosis • Habitat <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Protect agriculture/ranching lands ◦ Need to grow winter habitat in the area of feedgrounds • Actions are done for the right reasons: not emotion or political pressures, but for elk population health, and science-based decisions • State statutes on wildlife damage and compensation
Ideas or solutions the group hopes WGFD will explore in this future feedground management planning process:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researching and incentivizing specific ranching practices (e.g., trucking cattle, fencing during high transmission periods, etc.) • Funding, particularly: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ For land acquisition to expand winter habitat ◦ To deal with wildlife damage and conflict ◦ To incentivize ranching practices (above) ◦ Utilizing new funding sources, e.g., tourism, not-for-profits, etc. • WGFD addressing the needs of all stakeholders, not just agriculture and hunting/outfitting • A 3-pronged approach is needed to manage the populations and expectations of elk, livestock, and people • Needed staffing around damage prevention, more research, etc. • Being adaptable and willing to try, be wrong, learn, and correct
February 10, 2022	
Greatest concerns surrounding the issues associated with feedgrounds and CWD:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely complex issue with many factors outside of WGFD's control, yet the public expects the Department to make the right decision in light of CWD.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a disease that can't be stopped. • The political difficulties around the issue of closing feedgrounds. • How to balance population objectives in the face of CWD. • Reluctance to try anything that includes elimination of elk feeding, as well as discussion on how to create funding to mitigate such an action
Concepts that should be considered during plan development:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although complex, the issue shouldn't be feared. • Need to utilize resources to tackle the issue: funding, vast availability of public lands, etc. There are multiple avenues where revenue can be created to cover the costs to mitigate management actions • Although the disease can't be stopped, impact can be lessened. • Need to focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CWD's potential future impacts (not just the current impacts as the disease is just arriving.) ○ Decision making based on disease triggers, to provide accountability to management actions. ○ A plan that is structured (based on the current and projected outcomes of CWD) and adaptive (based on how the reality comes into play) • Free-ranging elk herds and livestock operations can/do co-exist • Consider if action item ideas are likely to be litigated. • Review other available feedground plans, such as the Brucellosis Management Action Plans (BMAPs) to evaluate success and adaptive structure.
Overarching management action items that should be explored in the feedground system as a whole during the planning process:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design a 5-year pilot project utilizing management tools that have already shown promise in Wyoming and neighboring states, and then implement the pilot project to test the strategies, some of which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Elk Fences as a tool that can help keep livestock safe during brucellosis transmission period ○ Expansion of Hunter Management Areas (HMAs) since they are proven to provide negative reinforcement to elk to move away from potential conflict situations. ○ Long-term leasing of private properties during winter, in

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	<p>addition to federal allotments used by wildlife or livestock rest during a specific time of year. Could work in conjunction with HMAs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Strategic phase-out of low-hanging fruit (i.e, feedgrounds with lower elk number, the highest potential to free-range, and the lowest risk of conflict, etc.), or perhaps those feedgrounds that are most vulnerable to CWD (with funding in place to offset or mitigate associated costs, as part of the phase-out strategy.)
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Government/Elected Officials

February 1, 2022

Biggest concerns or constraints around future feedground management:

- Concentrated elk and diseases
 - Brucellosis and CWD are the primary concerns
 - Brucellosis is still a concern, even though populations are sustainable. But with CWD, they are not
 - Carcass disposal for CWD-infected animals
 - Human safety if/when CWD jumps the species barrier
 - Bovine Tuberculosis
- Dealing with unpredictability and human adaptation
- A needed paradigm shift about accepting elk on private lands
 - Not only ranches (e.g., golf courses, residential areas)

Ideas or solutions the group hopes WGFD will explore in this future feedground management planning process:

- Acquiring habitat (free title, easements, others)
- Elk occupancy on private lands
- Maintain wildlife permeability in the landscape including wildlife crossings
- A clearly defined desired outcome for elk in Western Wyoming
 - And a realistic look at reducing elk population objectives as a way to 'buy time' for other strategies
- Plans that are specific to EACH feedground Cost-benefit analysis comparing funding to feeding vs. alleviating the need to feed
- Education of the public on
 - Herd #'s and related costs, disease risks, etc.
 - Realities of CWD risks and impacts on populations
- Being proactive now instead of a 'wait-and-see' approach
- More research on:
 - Dealing with / eliminating prions in the ground
 - Why some game herds have higher CWD prevalence than others
 - Transmission risks, and whether feeding localizes (versus increases) CWD footprint on the landscape

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February 23, 2022

Concepts that should be considered during plan development:

- Getting elk onto feedgrounds was monumental, as is getting them off. We need to think about it in decades.
- And, even though it is a long-term plan, there are things we can do today. (e.g., high fences are a pain, but fencing cattle feeding operations can give ranchers options and this could be done now.)
- Need to identify each issue at each feedground, and primary tools available.
- Elk cow/calf ratios as a projection of where populations are trending. Is it possible to focus harvest on cows vs cow/calf (e.g., removing cows which would have CWD).
- Consider encouraging more hunting on private lands
- Impacts of the endangered species act is also competing with elk herds (bears, wolves, etc)
 - Elk don't winter on places where they used to
- The public does not accept winter loss of elk
- Current expectation is to manage elk for a stable population, versus deer which have large population spikes and declines.
- Human health considerations:
 - We need to think about contamination management, e.g. scraping up soil
 - Invest in testing methodology, e.g., watershed testing, waste water testing?
- Cannot lose sight of brucellosis transmission to cattle
 - If CWD gets high enough to close feedgrounds
 - If we step up surveillance for CWD we need to have a plan for brucellosis
 - There is still a fund available to address livestock
- Some management strategies will require significant funds; the plan must address needed resources.
- Consider more elk occupancy agreements, to get elk to areas that can support them for the winter

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Landowners	
February 1, 2022	
<p>Biggest concerns or constraints around future feedground management:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Depredation and damage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ranching operations that support the land & lifestyle while also protecting from elk damage ● Brucellosis ● Loss of permitted grazing ● Slowing down CWD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reduce #s of elk fed in any specific area ○ Reduce problems by reducing #'s of elk via hunting ● Land management: risk of giving authority to federal agencies around critical winter range ● Traffic safety ● Predators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ E.g., what does elk distribution look like with wolves present? ● Impact on mule deer habitat
<p>Ideas or solutions the group hopes WGFD will explore in this future feedground management planning process:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Land acquisition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need alternatives to federal lands ○ Use or buy private lands ● Funding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To develop, maintain, and support needed changes ○ Toward CWD research ● Plans need to be on a feedground-by-feedground basis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Each feedground has different needs, situations ○ Property damage is different in each location (e.g., Jackson area homeowners vs. Pinedale area ranchers) ● Plans need to be flexible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adapt to changes, like harsh winters ● Feed over larger areas; spread elk out more with more forage ● Focus on habitat enhancement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use higher quality forage to shorten feeding seasons ○ Use alfalfa rather than native grasses ● “Winter Elk Management Areas” vs. feedgrounds

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher v.s Lower elevation feedgrounds • Education and outreach to landowners on hunting, feeding
February 24, 2022	
Most important ideas learned or reinforced in this process:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glad WGFD is working on this; it's important for our grandkids • Population questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Must we reduce elk populations in light of CWD? ◦ Can our range continue to handle large elk #'s? • Despite risks (highway safety, haystack damage, etc.), continue to support large elk populations • Need for more funding (via licenses, other revenue sources) for additional CWD research • Must improve elk forage quality, especially summer range <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Treat forest (e.g., timber harvest sales) ◦ Cattle grazing can improve elk forage • Consider potential feeding over a larger area, even private land, to spread elk out
Concerns to be addressed during plan development:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brucellosis and damage impacting ranchers/cattle industry • Dispersing elk as best as possible (will not eliminate, but minimize, risk of CWD) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Consider adding another FG to spread elk out ◦ Prioritize low density feeding (which may not be enough) • Do as much as we can, early as we can to slow CWD
Overarching management action items that should be explored in the feedground system as a whole during the planning process:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Increase license fees to generate revenue ◦ Invest in seeking alternative funding (e.g., Wildlife Tourism for Tomorrow) ◦ Seek funding from tourism sources ◦ Need to advertise conservation stamp to wildlife watchers, non-consumptive users

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Outfitters	
February 1 & 14, 2022	
Biggest concerns or constraints around future feedground management:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● WGFD's narrative around CWD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Avoid the public perception of using 'scare tactics' ○ Perception of some employees who hold anti-feedground agendas ● The role of politics in feedground management overall, and this process specifically ● Concerned that this process could result in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Limiting hunter opportunity ○ Reducing elk population objectives ● Negative impacts of CWD on elk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need to address CWD outbreaks on feedgrounds ● Concerns over impacts to mule deer on winter ranges if elk are displaced from feedgrounds
Ideas or solutions the group hopes WGFD will explore in this future feedground management planning process:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus on strong, healthy herds well into the future ● Work with other land management agencies and private landowners to explore increasing feeding area/reducing concentration ● A plan that is adaptable and durable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allow for changes when necessary ○ Don't hamstring ourselves into unacceptable results ○ Last for generations, regardless of WGFD personnel, government officials, etc. ● Make it a priority to remove any sick or dead animals showing symptoms of CWD ● Focus on reducing density on feedgrounds by expanding feeding areas, pursuing additional properties, etc ● Prioritize research nationwide <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Combine state and federal resources (funding, experts, etc) to create a central research center so information is available nationwide, and is consistent. Pursue research such as vaccines, prion decontamination, soils, etc ● No changes to elk population objectives

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Sportspersons	
February 1, 2022	
Biggest concerns or constraints around future feedground management:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Native winter range composition and availability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Competition with other big game due to elk occupancy ● CWD and its uncertainty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Concern over a level of bias related to the impacts of CWD ○ Need more information on CWD impacts related to FG's before you can make good mgmt decisions ● Elk conflict (human, vehicle, private lands) ● Diseases and related research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ More elk/CWD research needs to be prioritized ○ Testing and management plans to address CWD ○ CWD mutation (e.g., spread to cattle? humans?) ● Costs associated with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Moving feedgrounds ○ Having more / smaller feedgrounds ● Changing elk behaviors ● Maintain Herd Objectives / Hunting Opportunity ● Loss of competent feedground operators ● Funding ● Litigation ● Permit renewals from federal agencies ● Planning for the unknown (severe winters) ● Keep mitigating private land damage (e.g., stackyards)
Ideas or solutions the group hopes WGFD will explore in this future feedground management planning process:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Land acquisition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need alternatives to federal lands ○ Use or buy private lands ● Move FG's off of forest service / federal lands ● Fencing off elk conflict areas (private lands) ● Creating more FG's to disperse elk ● Winter range habitat improvements near FG's

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual adaptive management plan for each FG • Bring litigators to the table to help fund elk management
February 24, 2022	
Concerns to be addressed during plan development:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be flexible to address feedground challenges - triggers on FG management (e.g., CWD prevalence levels, weather, damage risks, feeding start/stop dates, etc.) • Feedgrounds are a management tool to be maintained • Transition FG's to state land, WGFD land, and/or private lands (via perpetual leasing) • Consider more FGs to spread out elk • Mechanize and update feedground operations to streamline, add efficiency (e.g., solar, cover feces) • Maximize hunter opportunities for elk and other species <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Maintain current elk objectives ◦ Minimal reductions, only if necessary • Improve and acquire more winter range habitats (WHMA's) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Especially focus on key locations near FGs ◦ Consider land acquisitions ◦ Repurpose AUMs on public lands for wildlife with consideration to agricultural industry • Transition livestock feeding on private lands <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Pay landowners to feed elk instead of livestock ◦ Ship livestock out of conflict areas
Overarching management action items that should be explored in the feedground system as a whole during the planning process:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain feedgrounds as a management tool • Continually improve and modernize feedground management • Diverse funding to address Elk FG's <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Damage claim money to go to FG management ◦ Non-traditional revenue sources (wildlife eco tours, local taxes, tourism based revenue) ◦ Improve funding specific to CWD and Elk FGs (Increase in dedicated personnel; resources available to address damage/conflicts; enhancements/upgrades at each FG) • Education on CWD without "scare factor", only factual. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Don't include models or speculation

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build plan to extend past current personnel and guide managers into the future ● Need site specific management actions at each FG ● Include a review schedule (5 years, etc.) so the plan is an adaptable “living document” ● CWD testing must occur every year and in every FG herd at some level
March 3, 2022	
Concerns to be addressed during plan development:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Any plan must be flexible to incorporate new information; do not put something in a plan that cannot be modified with new information ● Modify feedground management to reduce disease transmission potential ● Feedground management needs to be dynamic and flexible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider climatic variables ● More information shared with the public that is easily digestible, relevant ● Consider how different soil types at feeding sites (e.g., clay-based soils) might reduce exposure to prions ● Consider deer-to-elk disease transmission risks, and management options that reduce deer/elk commingling ● How can landowners/ranchers convert from cow/calf operations to yearling operations
Overarching management action items that should be explored in the feedground system as a whole during the planning process:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seek funding for testing, disease management, feedground management, and disease mitigation ● Public education on wildlife disease ● Maintain herd objectives and hunter opportunity ● Use hunters to help keep adequate populations ● Modify feedground practices to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reduce density on feedgrounds ○ Move feed off the ground to reduce contamination ○ Avoid feeding on bare ground ○ Reduce length of feeding time on feedgrounds ○ Reduce length of time elk at loafing areas ○ Find ways to remove manure from feeding areas

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Use technology to spread elk across more of the feeding area● Create a specific management plan for each feedground
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Non-Government Organizations

February 9&10, 2022

Biggest concerns or constraints around future feedground management:

- Disease; CWD and its long-range effects
- Brucellosis, hoof rot and TB
- Habitat
 - Protect agriculture/ranching lands
 - Need to grow winter habitat in the area of feedgrounds
- Actions are done for the right reasons: not emotion or political pressures, but for elk population health, and science-based decisions
- State statutes on wildlife damage and compensation

Ideas or solutions the group hopes WGFD will explore in this future feedground management planning process:

- Researching and incentivizing specific ranching practices (e.g., trucking cattle, fencing during high transmission periods, etc.)
- Funding, particularly:
 - For land acquisition to expand winter habitat
 - To deal with wildlife damage and conflict
 - To incentivize ranching practices (above)
 - Utilizing new funding sources, e.g., tourism, not-for-profits, etc.
- WGFD addressing the needs of all stakeholders, not just agriculture and hunting/outfitting
- A 3-pronged approach is needed to manage the populations and expectations of elk, livestock, and people
- Needed staffing around damage prevention, more research, etc.
- Being adaptable and willing to try, be wrong, learn, and correct

February 9 & 10, 2022

Most important concerns or obstacles to be addressed during plan development:

- This requires both long-term (management decisions are being made for our grandchildren) and near-term (urgency around CWD spread, with no action being taken) mindset
- CWD is not the only feedground disease of concern
- Must prioritize health of the elk and their ability to exist on their native land

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There are many hard truths to confront including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feeding wildlife is a universally disapproved practice ○ Public is addicted to high elk numbers ○ Politics (money, and will) influences feedground decisions in addition to (more than?) science ○ The social aspects of these decisions are the hardest ● Ranching/ag community and sportspersons must be willing to discuss alternatives and find solutions, come “part way” ● WGFD has been leading progress in other areas (BMAPs, etc.); must use their credibility to confront the hard truths and lead change on this issue, too ● Change will be unpopular at first, but people adapt and accept over time
<p>Overarching management action items that should be explored in the feedground system as a whole during the planning process:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plan based on best available science, modeling ● Adaptive management that responds to changing concerns ● A clearly communicated plan that reduces feeding as much as possible, and clear mitigation measures reducing CWD risk ● Protect winter range and migration corridors ● Prioritize livestock containment, so elk can move freely ● Acknowledgement by the WGFD leadership that with the reality of CWD, continued feeding is unacceptable ● Keep stakeholders involved when the plan begins addressing opportunities feedground-by-feedground ● Maintaining natural forage is important